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PRESS RELEASE

PARLIAMENT ADOPTS A PRIVATE MEMBER'S MOTION TO INVESTIGATE FAKE ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS

The Parliament of Sierra Leone has on Thursday 21st April 2022 debated and adopted a Private Member's Motion brought forward by Hon. Paul Saa Sam of C4C and seconded by Hon. Quintin Salia-Konneh, an Independent MP from Kailahun District on issues relating to fake degrees in possession of Civil and Public Servants.

The Private Member's Motion reads thus:

1. Be it resolved that, this Honourable House, Pursuant to Standing Order 25 and Section 93 (4) of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone, constitutes a Special Select Committee to conduct a certificate audit in all Ministries, Departments, and Agencies of Government regarding all diplomas, bachelors, masters and PhD degrees, acquired by all civil and public servants and Members of Parliament and Ministers of Government.
2. That the Select Committee shall request all oversight committees of Parliament to direct that all MDAs submit a audit report of academic certificates and degrees pursuant to Subsection (6) of Section 93 of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone for consideration by the Select Committee.

Moving the motion, Hon. Paul Saa Sam said at international level, the country has been put into bad light regarding fake certificates, adding that the ACC has failed in their mandate to carry out their functions as inscribed in the Anti- Corruption Act. He said in light of this, he wanted Parliament to take the leadership to probe academic certificates starting with the Parliament of Sierra Leone and MDAs of Government.

Seconding the motion, Hon. Quintin Salia-Konneh said he was disappointed in the way academic degrees were conferred on students and referenced an issue of a private university that was closed by Government for lack of accreditation by the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC). He underscored the point that, these fake universities have put the country into disrepute, and urged for serious actions to be taken against defaulters.

He called on the House to summon TEC for questioning in relation to accreditation of universities and colleges. "The dignity of the country has to be protected", he concluded.

Contributing to the motion, Hon. Rev. Sama Sandy said this was a welcome initiative by the House of Representatives to investigate matters relating to fake qualifications. He said the issue of academic fraud has to be investigated and called on MDAs to be part of the audit process, assuring the process was not going to be a witch-hunt.

Hon. Muniru Lansana supported the motion on the audit process for fake qualifications and advised that the process of investigations should not be politicized.

Leader of NGC in Parliament, Hon. Dr. Kandeh Kolleh Yumkella heaped praises on the two MPs for bringing the matter before the House. He said it was a total disgrace for someone to pay for a PhD and requested that all those who paid for PhD to submit their payment receipts and to later denounce their fake PhDs. "It is immoral to acquire a fake PhD in the country", he concluded.

Hon. Sahr Charles said Parliament should take all the necessary steps to address fake academic credentials. He said TEC should provide answers in light of its establishment and functions in the country.

An Independent MP from Kailahun, Hon. Emilia Lolloh Tongi said chancellors of universities have to be called upon and advised on doing the needful to maintain the dignity of academia in the country.

Rounding up the debate, the Acting Leader of the Opposition, Hon. Hassan Sesay said it was a disturbing situation for the country and it was putting the country in a bad light. He said the rampant fake credentials were affecting the human resource base of the civil service in the country. "We cannot acquire a degree on falsity in the country", and noted that TEC should not be blamed in this matter, saying that, every year they published accredited colleges and universities operating in the country.

Concluding the motion, the Acting Leader of Government Business, Hon. Bashiru Silikie said Government's policies were to address human capital development and assured that all fake degrees would be investigated. He also said that it was Parliament that created the TEC and that TEC should be seen doing their mandate; and urged them to step up in their responsibilities. He called on all MDAs to submit their credentials to the Special Select Committee in Parliament.

The Speaker of Parliament, Hon. Dr. Abass Chernor Bundu said that members of the Special Select Committee would be announced in the next sittings of Parliament.

In another development, Parliament of Sierra Leone has on Thursday 21/4/2022 debated the Bill entitled: "The Anti-Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Act 2021.

The Bill seeks to provide for the continuing in existence of the National Task Force on Human Trafficking, provide for continuing the existence of a secretariat to assist the task force, provide for the prosecution of the offence of human trafficking, provide for the prosecution of the offence of migrant smuggling, to provide for economic alternatives to human trafficking or smuggling of persons and to provide for other related matters.

Presenting the Bill to the House, the Minister of Social Welfare Baindu Dassama-Kamara said the process of drafting the bill started in 2016, and that stakeholders from the 14 districts were consulted to contribute to the Bill in order to have a better law that would stand the test of time. She said the Bill was divided into eight-parts and highlighted the numerous benefits when the Bill would have been enacted into law.

Hon. Rose Marie Bangura, Parliamentary Chairperson of Social Welfare Committee commended the Minister for bringing the Bill to Parliament and urged MPs to do due diligence on the document. Hon. Rose Marie has also requested for the Bill to be committed to the Legislative Committee for further deliberations.

Hon. Abdul Karim Kamara said it was sad for Sierra Leoneans to be trafficked outside the country. He said this human trafficking was mainly done by Sierra Leoneans. He highlighted several committees' reports including the Committee on Labour that have been tabled in Parliament for consideration by the House; adding that these reports were to be debated and recommendations adopted and forwarded to relevant MDAs to take the necessary actions.

Hon. Dr. Mark Mamoud Kalokoh in his submission highlighted the importance of the Bill and called for its timely and urgent passage into law.

Rounding up the debate, the Acting Opposition Leader, Hon. Hassan Sesay said trafficking was a perennial problem and pleaded for its passage and enforcement. He called for lawbreakers be punished in order to deter others from doing the trafficking.

In concluding the debate, the Acting Leader of Government Business, Hon. Bashiru Silikie referred to the Bill as "non-controversial", and noted that Parliament would do due diligence on the Bill, whilst highlighting the effects of migration relative to human trafficking.

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